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SUBJECT: CURRENT DROUGHT CONDITION IN KENYA MAKE  
HEADLINES AND PROBLEMS FOR THE GOVERNMENT

REF: NAIROBI 7341 AND PREVIOUS

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Summary  
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1. In recent days, the Kenyan press has been dominated by alarmist stories of the country's worsening famine situation in certain regions. Photographs of starving children and adults, as well as dead and dying livestock, along with headlines such as, "Starvation at Christmas," have raised the consciousness and immediacy of Kenya's long-standing and well-documented food crisis. Poor and intermittent short-rains in Kenya's most arid and semi arid areas are exacerbating the food crisis, particularly in the eastern and northern pastoral districts. The extended dry spell and the ensuing lack of pasture and water have culminated in livestock mortalities, acute malnutrition and reportedly some loss of life in several pastoral districts.

2. Relief assistance is being provided to affected households through the ongoing WFP/GOK Emergency Operation (EMOP). However, a persistent dry spell and a severe shortage of water, pasture and browse in pastoral areas and crop failures in parts of southeast and the coast are likely to result in increased vulnerability and, therefore, an additional need for relief assistance. The GOK has been much criticized in the media for its lack of planning despite many public assessments of such food, water, and pasture shortages if, as happened, normal rains did not come to the affected areas. End summary.

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Background  
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3. A drought emergency was declared by the Government of Kenya (GOK) in July 2004. Following an international appeal, more than 1.2 million Kenyans are receiving food and other assistance to lessen the humanitarian impact. Although the 2005 long-rains (March-June) improved agricultural production and pastoral conditions in several regions, the northeastern districts of Wajir, Mandera and parts of Marsabit received almost no "short rains" (October-December) and were recently assessed as slow to recover. The districts are mostly comprised of pastoralists that rely on livestock production for food security and livelihood.

4. UNICEF conducted a nutritional assessment in Garissa, Wajir and Mandera from October 6-20 to determine levels of malnutrition in children less than five years. The survey indicated alarmingly high malnutrition levels in the areas. For instance, in Wajir, Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) was reported to be 29.8 percent, much higher than the 15 percent emergency threshold. (Reftel- Nairobi 05074)

5. The short-rains season contributes close to 70 percent of the farm output in the marginal agricultural or southeast and coastal lowlands of Kenya. Similarly, the eastern and northern pastoralists rely on rains for water, pasture and browse for their livestock.

16. In contrast, the long-rains maize harvest in Nyanza and Rift Valley Provinces was estimated at 10 percent above the long-term average. As a result, the December price for maize in these areas was 30-35 percent lower than in 2004. The decline in price is negatively affecting household income. Already, aggrieved farmers are petitioning the government to support prices, ostensibly by raising the buying price offered by the National Cereal Produce Board (NCPB). A number of factors including lack of purchasing power, inadequate roads and trade infrastructure, and market inefficiencies explain the paradoxical scenario of food shortage in the midst of abundant supply.

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Current Situation  
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17. The 2005 short-rains season failed in most drought prone pastoral and marginal agricultural areas. This same weather pattern is also affecting parts of Somalia. In particular, rains have been poor and intermittent in the eastern and northern pastoral districts including Mandera, Wajir, and parts of Marsabit. According to the Arid Lands and Resource Management Project (ALRMP), in Mandera and Wajir districts, less than 40 percent of the areas received showers; the rest remained extremely dry. As a result, pastoralists and livestock must trek up to 20 miles or more in search of water, pasture and browse, and in the process, livestock have weakened. Reports indicate that due to the scarcity of water and increased clustering around water points, the frequency of borehole breakdown has escalated in most eastern and northern pastoral districts. There have been a number of reports of livestock herds invading private ranches and nature reserves in search of adequate water and grazing land.

18. Livestock deaths have also been reported in areas where rains are relatively more favorable, mainly due to the inability of the emaciated animals to withstand sudden lowering of temperature. Reportedly, most of the animals are now kidding and calving, hence, their increased vulnerability. Increased miscarriages have also been reported due to the weakened livestock body conditions.

19. The average livestock price has declined by margins ranging from 8-10 percent for cattle and about 5 percent for the small ruminants. Persistent decline in prices will, undoubtedly, have detrimental effects on the already fragile pastoral livelihood, exacerbating poor household food security.

110. Owing to the above scenario, the need for emergency food and non-food assistance is expected to expand from current beneficiary numbers of 1.2 million up to 2.5 million. A multi-agency food security assessment covering 22 drought-affected districts is scheduled to begin in early January. The assessment results, expected to be available in mid-February, will reveal details on the magnitude of the crisis and required interventions.

111. Press reports have been alarmist and often inaccurate. But the photos and stories of suffering and death are real enough to require a personal response from President Kibaki, who traveled to Northeastern province on December 27. Despite repeated government claims that this is an act of nature, and there is no fault to be attributed, many editorials and commentators have placed the blame squarely on the GOK's lack of preparedness and misplaced priorities.

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Response to Date  
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112. Donors, the United Nations and NGOs have been responding to emergency conditions in Kenya since the GOK's original drought appeal in July 2004. The World Food Program (WFP) is currently distributing a full basket of maize, pulses and vegetable oil to approximately 1.1 million beneficiaries in 17 districts, in addition to the expanded school feeding program covering 200,000 school children.

113. USAID contributes approximately thirty five percent of WFP drought emergency commodities. An additional pledge of 12,000MT of wheat is being considered to be swapped with local maize for immediate relief distribution. USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance provided over US\$ 1

million in October to support water and agricultural activities in eastern and northeastern provinces.

14. USAID/Kenya Relief Coordinator, USAID/OFDA Regional Advisor and FFP/REDSO representative are scheduled to visit northeastern, eastern and other drought-affected areas during the first two weeks of January.

15. There have been credible reports of the GOK distributing food out side of the EMOP in an attempt to encourage a positive response to the November 21 constitutional referendum. (The referendum failed.) Now the government is renewing its efforts to get food to highly impacted areas, and has enlisted the military's help. The GOK has doubled its in-kind contribution to 10,000 MT of maize. Other contributions include US\$1.27 million from the Swedish Government to fund associated costs of the GOK's in-kind contribution; Euro 2.25 million from ECHO for water/nutrition/protection activities in Mandera. DFID is considering a GBP 1.2 million to support nutrition program in Mandera, Wajir and Marsabit districts. Additional pledges are needed to meet the current pipeline gap of approximately 27,000 MT, as well to address the imminently large-scale relief needs beyond February 2006.

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Comment  
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16. In many communities in Eastern, Northeastern, and Coast Provinces, the current situation is dire and deadly. Yet, the situation is not unanticipated. Most of these areas are covered under the on-going emergency operation, and it was widely known that poor short-rains could trigger a large-scale crisis. Despite the regularity of such crises in recent years, the GOK still has not put in place an effective system for getting assistance to these economically and politically marginalized areas.

17. Inevitably, the drought condition described above as well as farmers' inability to generate sufficient incomes will have negative implications for household food security. In addition, the substantial livestock mortalities suggest that even if the season improves, the pastoral livelihood will take a much longer time to recover, implying growing chronic food insecurity.

18. This situation calls for a more proactive engagement from the GOK to address the root causes of such extreme vulnerability. Although the crisis is often triggered by unfavorable weather, the real predicament is rooted in the massive underdevelopment which characterizes eastern and northeastern pastoralist areas. Hence, it is high time that the GOK critically re-examines its development strategy in these chronically food insecure areas. Likewise, on-going and future development assistance should increasingly find ways to alleviate the problem. An increasingly important part of the puzzle is getting pastoralist population to diversify their livelihoods while developing new local and international markets for their animals, within the limits of the land's carrying capacity. Selling emaciated livestock to the government as a last resort to stave off starvation is not an economic model to perpetuate.

19. Nevertheless, continued emergency assistance to the worst-affected households will be necessary to avoid a catastrophic situation and prevent further loss of livelihood. Specific food and non-food requirements will be detailed in future cables, as additional information becomes available. Post is also in discussion with the World Food Program with respect to joint planning for Kenya and Somalia.

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